

Edmonton Street News

ESN

Volume 4

Issue 8

2007



Vendors pay 50 cents per paper

City Groups That Provide Meals

Bissell Centre

10527-96 Street 423-2285
Sunday 12:00 -1:30 p.m., sandwiches and
snacks after church service
Monday to Thursday -
10:30 a.m. - sandwiches
Tuesday and Friday - noon - hot lunch for
women
Friday 9:45 a.m. - sandwiches

Christ Church 12116-102 Avenue 488-1118
5:30 meal every 3rd Saturday of the month

Herb Jamieson Centre 10014-105A Avenue
429-3470

Only for men who are not on assistance. If on
assistance, they must get permission from
their worker

Monday to Friday - 7:00 to 7:45 breakfast
12:00 to 12:45 p.m. lunch
5:00 to 5:45 p.m. supper
Weekends 11:00 to 11:45 a.m. brunch
4:00 to 4:45 p.m. supper

Edmonton Inner City Victory Church

10665-98 Street
Friday 7:00 to 8:00 meal

House of Refuge Mission

10339-95 Street
Daily-8:00 p.m. meal

J-Jireh Mission Soup Kitchen - East

11905- 82 Street 489-9138
Wednesday and Sunday 4:00 p.m. meal

J-Jireh Mission Soup Kitchen - west

10137 - 150 Street 489-9138
Thursday - 4:00 p.m. meal
Sunday - 10:00 a.m. meal

Lighthouse Ministries

3010-119 Avenue
423-1277 or 474-8086
Wednesday and Sunday
1:00 and 7:00 p.m. meal

Marian Centre

10528-98 Street 424-3544
Daily except Wednesday
12:00 to 12:45 p.m. meal
Closed from the 27th of each month to re-
open the 1st of next month

Mustard Seed

10636-96 Street
426-5600
Monday to Friday 7:00 to 8:00 supper
Zero tolerance of alcohol

Operation Friendship

9526-106 Avenue 429-2626
Monday to Friday - 9:00 a.m. breakfast
Monday to Sunday - 12:00 noon lunch
5:00 p.m. supper
for seniors 55 and over only

Red Road Healing Society

4225-118 Avenue 471-3220
Tuesday and Thursday - 5:00 p.m. meal
Friday - 12:00 to 1:00 soup and bannock

River of Life Church

11368-95 Street 479-6762
Thursday and Friday -
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. lunch

Robertson Wesley United Church

10209 - 123 Street 482-1587
Second Saturday of each month -
5:00 p.m. meal

Sai Sadan

9619-101 Avenue upstairs
Wednesday - 6:00 p.m. meal

Salvation Army

9620-101A Avenue 242-9222
Friday - 7:30 a.m. breakfast

St. Peter's Lutheran Church

9606 - 110 Avenue 426-1122
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday - 7:00 to
9:00 a.m. breakfast

St. Faith's Anglican

11725-93 Street - parish hall
477-5931
Thursday - 12:30 p.m. soup
Saturday - 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. breakfast
3rd Friday of the month - 7:00 supper

Victory Café and Soup Bar

13411- Fort Road
Monday - 5:30 to 6:45 meal

Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre

9611-101A Avenue 423-5302
Meals for women staying at the shelter. If not,
a bag lunch is given.

Edmonton Orthodox Reformed Church

11610 - 95A St.
Worship Services 10AM & 6PM Sunday
Mondays 6:15 Youth Gym Night
Thursdays 6:15 Soup & Study - Free!
Info: Pete Wright - 479-1860
www.orcure.org

B's Diner -100 Street and Whyte Avenue -
meals, Wednesdays 1 to 3 p.m.

Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre -
15210-Stoney Plain road - meals - Mondays 7
to 8 p.m.

Free Soup, sandwich and other food items at:
One Accord Bible F Baptist Church
10802 - 93rd street,
from:
10:00 to 1:00 pm
Saturdays
for Info: 425-6310
or 710-6311



Vandere nou 50 cents per copie

EDMONTON STREET NEWS

Edmonton Street News
Volume 4 Issue 8, 2007

Edmonton Street News is an independent publication produced by volunteers and sold by vendors on the street.

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Cover photo Linda Dumont - Daryll Strong, a resident of Tent City

The deadline for advertisements and submissions for the next issue is August 15.

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Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 0S9

The views presented in this publication are those of the writers.

Donations Needed

Edmonton Street News Society is collecting donations to help the homeless. We need: tents, blankets, towels, food, jackets, jeans, shoes, sweats, socks, running shoes, backpacks, personal care items, radios, books, towels and can openers. All items will be distributed free of charge to those in need.

Please call Linda at 428-0805 or Pedro at 710-3214 to arrange for drop off of donations, or bring donations to the Edmonton Street News office at 9533-106A Avenue



Hugh MacDonald, MLA
Edmonton-Gold Bar

Edmonton Gold Bar Constituency Office
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Edmonton, Alberta, T6A 0H7
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e-mail: hugh.macdonald@assembly.ab.ca
website: www.liberalopposition.com

Alberta's Housing Crisis Continues



As the housing crisis continues, the provincial government has stepped in with some attempts to assist people who are threatened with loss of housing due to the increased cost of staying housed, and has provided some help for those in Edmonton's tent city, but for those left

homeless, these measures appear to be too little, too late.

I spoke with Councillor Michael Phair about Tent City, and asked what is to become of the people living there once the weather turns cold. He said there is funding in place to increase the number of shelter beds between November 1st and April 30th. Because the tents are on provincial land, the city has little to do with the tent city aside from providing policing. Through Capital Health, Tent City has been provided with a water tank of fresh water, four portable out-houses, and a wash stand for people to wash their hands and faces. The number of tents has increased during the month of July from about 40 tents on July 1st to nearly 65 on July 31st.

Edmonton City Police are a regular presence at Tent City, especially during the night when the degree of violence increases. I walk past Tent City nearly every day, and have seen people being arrested for open liquor and other violations. One young man showed me a ticket he was given for "trespass" after he had been living at the tent city for several weeks, because he ran afoul of some of the other residents who complained to the police about him. Having been evicted from Tent City, he slept in an alley.

There had been reports of gang members moving in, but the tent city has since eradicated the rowdy residents. Some of the residents are territorial about protecting their own turf, so if you are standing too close to someone's tent, you may be asked to leave in the same way that trespassers are asked to leave private property anywhere.

The people who have moved into Tent City are mainly the north side homeless, and the majority of the homeless who live on the south

side have not moved downtown. In addition, many people prefer to be away from the violence that can come with communal living or to live more privately, so there are still tents pitched in the river valley and in isolated treed spots throughout the city, as well as people sleeping on old mattresses and bits of cardboard.

There has been a small increase of \$50 in Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), but landlords are quick to take advantage of any small windfalls their tenants receive. Social Services have been offering assistance to people on welfare who are at risk of losing their housing, even in some cases increasing the monthly allowance. One woman I know was given a monthly increase of \$300 to her welfare cheques to offset the high cost of her rental accommodation.

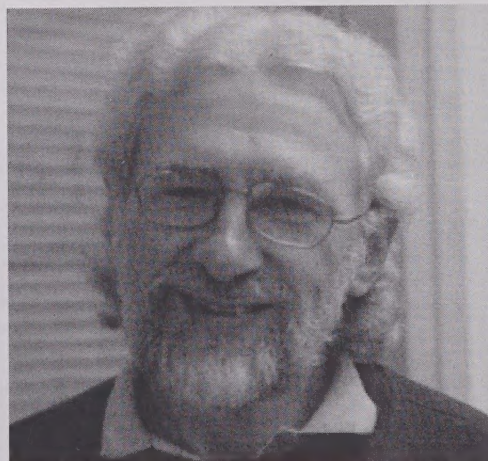
Along with last months welfare reporting card, Social Services sent out a notice about the Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund which is designed 'to provide short-term assistance to prevent Albertans from becoming homeless and to help individuals and families to stabilize their shelter arrangements.'

They said the fund will cover damage deposits, rental and utility arrears, moving costs, and first months rent (see Norma's story on page 3.) The notice also said there is no limit to the amount issued or the number of times benefits are issued. To get help, people are to go to one of the Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry offices located across the province.

Unfortunately, already the funding for this is in danger of running dry due to the sheer number of people who need this assistance. The \$9-million provincial rent assistance fund is being swamped with hundreds of unanticipated requests for cash and will run out of money by September, prompting the associate minister of affordable housing to ask her colleagues to cough up more than double that amount to keep the program afloat until next year. Yvonne Fritz said it will likely run out in September, when her department predicts it will have provided funding to about 1,500 Albertans hammered by rent increases. When the money was announced in April's budget, it was supposed to last until March 2008. She estimates that about \$20 million in extra funding is needed.

By Linda Dumont

Pedro's News and Views – A Challenge to Christians



The greatest thing we can do for the needy as Christians is to pray for them. God wants us to help them. If we truly have Christ living in us, his love will be evident through our works and deeds. Jesus said, "... I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brethren; you were refusing to help me. And they will go away into eternal punishment, prepared for the devil and his angels, but the righteous will go to eternal life, Matthew 25: 31-46

There are so many things God ants to do for the poor and needy through his chil-

dren. I wouldn't accept a million dollars in exchange for the joy, peace, and love God has blessed me with by getting things for the poor then passing them on to them.

Churches and Christians have asked what they can do, so here are some suggestions:

1. I believe God will especially bless Christians who are willing to sell their church buildings and share their services with other groups so the money can be used to buy an apartment to rent out at reasonable rates, helping to meet people's emotional, spiritual and physical needs.

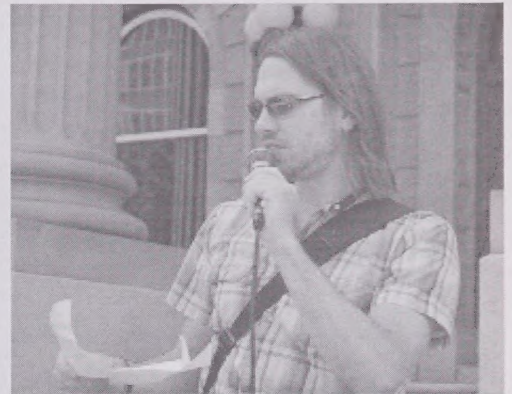
2. Providing shelter for the 100's of abused families that are turned away because of the lack of facilities. In the past Christians shared their homes with the poor and abused, helping them in many ways. Many working homeless people have no place to live, take a shower or heat up food. They would be glad to pay some rent for a safe place to stay.

3. Providing trailers or at least tents that the homeless could rent. The government has been approached as to where to set them up.

4. Let people sleep in the church as refugees do in other parts of the world.

Pedro Schutlz

Affordable Housing Rally First of Many



ADAH member Greg Farrants spoke at the June 27th rally for affordable housing.

ADAH RALLY - August 18 at City Hall. People will be meeting at the south end of the fountain at 1 p.m. and marching to the Alberta Legislature with the rally program beginning at about 2 p.m. The program will consist of a range of speakers and several local artists and musicians.

Albertans Demand Affordable Housing

(ADAH) was a key player in organizing the July 27th affordable housing rally at the Alberta legislature, and they are planning another rally for August 18th. The July 27th rally attracted about 100 people who marched around the legislature grounds with signs demanding housing, then gathered to listen to speakers including self-styled street pastor Pedro Schultz, Edmonton Street News editor Linda Dumont, Diane Wood, a homeless woman, and ADAH member Greg Farrants. In addition, Dan Scaber played the guitar and sang his own musical compositions, and Julio read poetry.

by Linda Dumont

To Editor

I am a proponent of Edmonton's Tent City as a temporary fix as we strive to solve the housing crisis – perhaps, strive towards Universal Housing. Tent City should be kept safer and maintained as a dignified temporary shelter by the City of Edmonton AND the government of Alberta while the province and cities look at a wide range of solutions that go beyond the free market. The Province needs to stop treating the impoverished as second class citizens in order to cure rather than bandage the issue. If this were realized, perhaps Tent City would not be a policing matter; or, for the sake of those who are homeless and living in Tent City, wouldn't be needed at all. Approximately 1 billion people are housed informally in the world. That means, people living in make-do tents, shacks, under bridges, in caves, elevator shafts, you name it. Given that fact, you would think that solving our relatively small homeless problem (of 2650 people in Edmonton) and overall housing issue in

Alberta would be easy. However, this is not the case given the current and previous Conservative governments' stance on housing – that is, letting the free market deal with it. This housing issue is not simply felt by the homeless and impoverished, but also seniors, students (as we will see come late August) and – to a growing extent – middle income and working people. While our urban landscape is increasingly being blanketed with unaffordable single-family homes, a rupture in our socioeconomic landscape is swallowing a growing number of people. Banks, developers, big business, and a Conservative government that caters to the aforementioned have arranged this from the start of this boom. A boom, that we must ask, is for whom? Greg Farrants
Albertans Demand Affordable Housing

Greg Farrants

Albertans Demand Affordable Housing

Roommate Disaster –Part 11 Three Months Later

I finally have found a place to live, after looking night and day at 100 to 200 places! The interesting thing about taking three months to find a place to live, was that every place I looked at there were at least ten to thirty persons looking at the same place due to the fact that there is less than a 1% percent vacancy rate. Whether it was a basement suite or apartment; if you are not the person the landlord wants, for a renter you're out.

Most landlords wanted persons who were working and not receiving government assistance. A few of them wanted credit references, work history and early damage deposits. One of the landlords told me there was an awesome one bedroom with a balcony and a hardwood floor in the living room soon to be available. This was exactly what I wanted so I gave the caretaker \$300.00 towards a damage deposit and waited for her return phone call. She had already stated that she wanted me live in her apartment block, but she wanted me to live in a bachelor suite.... I waited patiently for this return call and finally after waiting one week I contacted this wonderful landlady and she told me that there was no apartment to rent and that she was not giving me back my \$300.00! I outsmarted her, however, by contacting her manager and the landlord and tenants board. When I contacted her manager, I was told that they would contact this caretaker right away. Within 20 minutes, the lady called me back and told me that I should

come over to her apartment that night and she would give me back my \$300.00. Praise the Lord!

Many of the one-bedroom and basement suites advertised in the Journal were gone before I called and I did not have a chance to see them. In a few situations the landlord told me to come over and see a place and 15 minutes later that place was gone. Most one-bedroom apartments had rent from \$500.00 to 700.00 or more, and this was classified as being in the low-income part of town. One landlord was charging \$550 - 600 for a bachelor suite and no less than \$700.00 for a dumpsy one-bedroom suite in need of painting. On the other hand the basement suites that I looked at were quite interesting; one large suite on the south side was going for \$700.00 without utilities after being fixed up. I decided that I could not afford this fancy basement suite, as it was too expensive.

Just a few years ago, in 2002 I rented a big one bedroom suite for only \$300.00 a month! I viewed at least 10 basement suites, which ranged from \$500 - 700.00. A few of the owners wanted me to live in their suites; however, I was not allowed to do this because I do not drink, smoke or have wild parties and the renters up stairs had did these things.

Finally after desperately looking for three months I called a fellow on a Saturday who had a one-bedroom basement suite for \$650 including the utilities in the old Beverly part of town. This owner told me to come over

and view the place on Sunday afternoon, but he also told me that there were at least 30 other persons looking at this small suite; however, he wanted to interview me. After talking to me for at least thirty minutes, he introduced me to his in-laws who lived up stairs and told me that he would call me back by 4:00 p.m. to tell me if I had place to live. He only asked me for two references, which did not include credit references, work history or a police security check. This had to be a miracle; most places give you the full interrogation treatment.

He called me back at 4:00 p.m. and told me that I had a place to live! Unbelievable! All I needed was the damage deposit of \$600.00 and the signing of a six-month lease! I only had \$400.00; however, this was accepted. Next, in order for me to live in this humble basement, I needed to talk to some government authorities and somehow they felt sorry for me and gave me the extra \$200 for the deposit and upped my government assistance by \$300.00 a month. This is another miracle that never usually happens; however, in our present housing crisis, the government of Alberta, has decided to step in and help folks in need.

In conclusion, my exhausting search for my own place to live has finally ended. With the help of God, my friends and the government, I moved into my new home on June 1. My basement suite may not be fancy but it's home!

By Norma Harms

Edmonton's Tent City



For the past month, the lot just west of the Bissell Centre has been Edmonton's tent city, with about 65 tents, a water tank that is refilled twice a week, four portable toilets, a wash stand, and a dumpster for garbage that is emptied twice a week. There is also a local government of sorts. A group of four tents towards the centre of the lot houses Dean Cardinal, the new 'mayor' of Tent City and his security, Kevin Soto, as well as a couple of other Christians.

Cardinal said when Smurf, the former mayor of Tent City found a place and moved on, he was asked to take over. As mayor, he and his 'security' walk around the lot and ask people to clean up around their tents, empty the garbage, and pick up anything that could be used as a weapon and throw it away.

The Boyle Street Co-op has been working with the people at Tent City to find housing, Cardinal said, and quite a few people have moved out when they found places. The police don't want too many people on the lot, so they have set a limit of 65 tents, as new people move in.

Cardinal said he has heard rumours that Tent City will be shut down the begin-

ning of August. "I don't have any set plans (if that happens), but if I have to move this tent city somewhere else, I will. We have everybody here, and we have all the facilities. If we move, the city will have to provide that for us somewhere else."

When asked about the violence and drug use on the lot Cardinal said, "The rowdy people have been weeded out by the police so it hasn't been that bad lately. It also helps with us walking around." He added that the lot starts to get livelier about 9 p.m., but he lives in the 'Christian corner' so it is a quieter area.

"We Christians kind of stick together," he said. "This is not a good place for a lot of people, like the elders here. There is lots of stress, and there are still fights and drugs, even though it's slowed down quite a bit."

Cardinal had been homeless for about three months, and living at the tent city since early July. He is on medical welfare due to a back injury, and hoped to be able to find a place at the end of the month.

Kevin Soto is kept busy as 'security' and cleaning up the lot. 'All of the garbage cans were filled by noon. I had to empty



them into the bin," he said.

He has been homeless for about three weeks, and works at casual labour jobs when he can, but he said it is very difficult to get enough money to rent a place.

Soto said people come by the lot and drop off donations. That's how he got his trap, tent, mattress and sleeping bag.

People can drop off tents, bedding, traps, food or clothing with Cardinal and Soto for distribution.

By Linda Dumont



Photos: Dean Cardinal outside his tent on the lot west of the Bissell Centre.

Jules Harkin is one of the residents of Tent City.

Jesse stands by his tent in the Christian Corner of Tent City.



Knit, Pearl, Soup and Bannock, Wednesday at JP HAWC

The Compassionate Crafters is a community knitting group that produces hats, blankets, and gloves for people who have no homes. The Crafters originated from the West Meadows Baptist Church, although the group welcomes everyone of all faiths and orientations to join them at their table at the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre (JP

HAWC) at 15210-Stony Plain Road). Wednesdays between 10 a.m. and noon. The group brings a lovely dynamic to the centre, especial when their happy chatter and clicking knitting needles begin to mingle with the delicious aroma of soup and bannock being cooked up in the adjoining kitchen. The crafters provides knitting materials and

offers lessons for those who need it. They donate the finished products to people who cannot otherwise afford them; other times the products are sold for money that funds the crafter's lunch program. Lunch is served to all the people in the centre at noon after the knitting ends.

by Gail Kelly, Photo by Murray Soroka

Tents of Hope

My grandfather came to Edmonton in 1905 when he was nine years old. He lived in Edmonton's first Tent City. From a distance the area was dotted by white government-issued tents that were pitched in the Rosedale flatlands located across the river from South Edmonton (Strathcona). Grandpa talked about the building of the bridge. It would take the train that stopped at Strathcona over the North Saskatchewan River where it would link Rosedale to the world of commerce and trade. The MacDonald Hotel stood high above the tent city from the top of the hill. Edmonton intended to overtake Strathcona as the hub of construction and trade.

Along with the bridges, development included a power plant and a train station. The city grew from a population of 2,500 to 25,000 in a single decade, one of Edmonton's many booms. Grandpa guessed that Edmonton (North Edmonton) was about seven blocks long at that time. Some Strathcona merchants opposed the expansion at first, unwilling to relinquish their station as last stop to merchandise! But overall, commerce and railroads meant progress and the Ching! Ching! made it seem righteous.

In principle it supported the Crown's decision (British rule) to appropriate Aboriginal land. Indians had used the land as their own trade, culture, and hunting area. The Crown, however, claimed all land for England that was not marked by buildings, documentation, or agriculture. Europeans did not consider women's work though, so the land that the Aboriginal women tilled, planted, and harvested could not be exempted from the Crown's land grab.

The settlers had the opportunity to get in on the boom. Even little guys like Grandpa found work. He sold news papers in front of the MacDonald Hotel for the nearly two years that his family lived in Tent City. Like many other Tent City residents, my grandpa's family had to wait for their squatters' papers, which would allow them to clear land and

build a home on their new homestead. The homestead was situated on important Indian hunting ground. Many Native families still live in the region. The area's addictions treatment and healing center adds to the Native

**He sold news papers
in front of the
MacDonald Hotel for
the nearly two years
that his family lived in
Tent City.**

population.

Addiction and depression is a condition that every colonized Aboriginal population in the world suffers from. This is a matter of course as addiction and depression are normal responses to abnormal situations, such as the eviction of entire populations from their homes, traditional resources, and opportunities. Such abuses cause mass post-traumatic-stress disorders that can take generations to alleviate.

My dad (grandpa's son-in-law), remembers another one of Canada's housing shortages, after WWII. Trailer parks were built to accommodate the returning soldiers and another influx of immigrants. My dad lived in a trailer park in the town of Jasper Place at the time. He would often dream of the day when he could leave the trailer and purchase a house, just as my grandfather dreamed of the day that he would leave the tent city and move into the ox-pulled wagon that would take his family 100 miles through mud and bush, to their government-issued homestead.

The day grandpa's family arrived at their homestead, his mother stepped out of the clearing and into the pitch black forest. Suddenly lost and blind to the way out, she broke down and by the time she was found, it was too late. She died soon after, too exhausted from living the life of the homeless. For two full years, across water and

land, she had no home and poor food; before that, they were farm laborers, beasts of burden, working for the price of place to sleep at night. They were to be the first of the family to own land.

My grandmother said Grandpa's mother became very sick while crossing the Atlantic Ocean. She never really recovered. She just gave up, certain that a better life would never come. In contrast, my grandfather, his brother and father, and even my dad in the trailer court, did not give up hope for a better life. Instead they made the best of what they had. When they could afford only a thin slice of land, they fit in a small trailer; when they only had a tent, they pitched it. Whenever they told their stories, both the tent and the trailer always appeared as symbols that promise new beginnings, taking them a step closer to home.

I felt the same energetic anticipation when interviewing some of the people that pitched tents behind the Bissell Center. Tents are a start. In Grandpa's day, rooming houses and small spaces that suited simple lifestyles popped up and surrounded the tent city. The residents were able to participate in the development, through commerce, construction, and industry. Hence, they worked to build the community that was their home.

We need to take a lesson from the past. Tents are a start, but since people do not generally leap from a tent into an apartment, transition spaces are essential. Tents, trailers, rooming houses, co-op housing, and innovative housing models are the bridges that keep us progressing. Appropriate housing is not the reserve of a privileged few, it is a human right. As sad as it is that people must live in tents, for many, the tent shelters that are popping up across the city are as much a statement of faith as they are a testimony to a social crisis that keeps people sleeping on the streets. For me, the tents pitched outside of the Bissell are tents of hope, signs of a better life to come.

by Gail Kelly

Keeping the city's heart healthy

Downtown business owner says positive activity helps integrate marginalized people into the community

Geoff Linden has a point to make as we begin a conversation: "I'm not an advocate for the homeless." He is a business owner and operator—and an advocate for year-round festivals, markets, and other "positive activities" on Sir Winston Churchill Square. But in making his case for more life in the heart of the city in a letter to the editor of the Edmonton Journal (Churchill Square has potential to become a year-round attraction, July 16, 2007, Page A19) Linden reveals an understanding of "the marginalized people who call the square home" that is rare in the retail community, and even among some people (including me) who do think of themselves as advocates for the poor, homeless, and marginalized.

Geoff is the manager and part owner of the Three Bananas Café, which sits on the south-eastern edge of Churchill Square. It's early in the afternoon of July 24. We sit on high chairs at a long table looking north onto the square. We see a steady stream of people walking by and market tents selling items ranging from fashion accessories to mobile phones. To the right, on 99th Street, tents for A Taste of Edmonton serve a wide variety of foods and beverages. It's past the lunch-time rush, but the scene in front of us is still busy, yet relaxed. Which makes one of the points in Linden's letter to the editor: "the behaviour and interaction of all people improves when the square is full of positive activity."

Does that mean, I ask, that the street people stay away when the square is busy? No, replies Linden. They are still there. But "they are integrated. Nobody sticks out." Then he adds, "To me, that's what a city is about."

What a revolutionary concept: the idea of a city as a place where many different kinds of people can live and interact together, without sticking out, without drawing attention to themselves or each other, without intimidating or being intimidated by others.

Well, perhaps not so revolutionary. Great cities have always attracted and welcomed diversity among their people and on their streets. What is revolutionary, or at least unique, is that someone doing business in the heart of downtown Edmonton is saying positive things about street people. He doesn't want to get rid of them, he wants to encourage activities that integrate them into a more positive environment. Think of the

public stance of many business owners in the Old Strathcona district for contrast.

Not that the situation on Churchill Square is the same as in Old Strathcona. It's not. Linden sees "a generation gap" among street people.

The ones who hang out in Old Strathcona tend to be in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Churchill Square attracts street people who are younger or older. The younger ones, mostly teenagers, many of them skateboarders, stay outside, on the square. It is the older ones, in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, who come into his café.

They are nearly always well-behaved, often interesting, people, Linden finds. "We get to meet people two or three minutes at a time, every day," he explains. That may not be enough to build strong friendships, but it is sufficient to support a small circle of mutual respect and friendly acquaintance. Many of these casual friends may appear "a bit dishevelled," compared to the more main-

Geoff Linden understands that he is part of the problem that sucked the life out of the heart of our city

stream clientele, but in other respects, they are not much different.

Linden says he always stops for five minutes or so to chat with a woman who comes in every day. He doesn't know anything about the problems she may have, but he does know "she cares about her kids", Linden says. "I take an interest in her life, and she takes an interest in mine." There doesn't seem to be anything profound or enduring in the relationship. But there is respect, and that can be rare, where street people are involved.

"Other (street) people we see every day just want their cup of coffee," Linden adds. They, too, are welcome. Linden does not set a limit on the amount of time customers can sit in the café. They can stay as long as they like.

No one has abused the privilege, so far, says Linden. Even in the coldest days of last winter, no one tried to "take up residence" at The Three Bananas. And no one refused a request to move on when new paying cus-

tomers needed their space.

Linden says his point in telling his story and pressing the need for more activity on Churchill Square is not to minimize the challenges presented or faced by marginalized people on the streets of downtown Edmonton. His point is that when there is no activity on the square, when it is just "an open patch" in the heart of the city, Churchill Square is not a "comfortable" place. That's when the street people, both young and old become visible. And that's when many people feel intimidated or fearful enough to avoid the place, which simply compounds the problem. Moving the street people on doesn't help. It simply shifts a problem that belongs to everyone into somebody else's backyard.

Linden freely admits that he is part of the lifestyle that has helped turn the heart of his city into a place of fear and emptiness for much of the year. He lives in the suburbs south of Ellerslie Road.

After moving to Edmonton from Saskatoon and working in the construction industry here for 15 years, Linden decided to follow his heart into the food service business. That took him downtown, where friends warned him that he would have "problems" doing business on square. It hasn't worked out that way.

During the eight months he has managed The Three Bananas, he has had his eyes opened to some aspects of life on the streets and found that it's not as intimidating as many Edmontonians think—and as he might have thought before he came to the area.

There are valid concerns about safety and security in the heart of the city. There is also life there. There is hope. There is opportunity. What is not there, too often, is positive, festive, celebratory activity. Which is too bad, because that is why Churchill Square is there. That is what it is designed for.

And if Geoff Linden understands that he is part of the problem that sucked the life out of the heart of our city, he also understands that he has to be part of the solution. He says he doesn't have enough time or energy to do much himself to make Churchill Square more active outside the summer months. But he can try to start a conversation about it.

Pointing out the obvious seems like a good place to begin.

by Allan Sheppard

Letter to Gene

The author of this letter to Gene Zwozdesky likes to share his views with the honourable ladies and gentlemen of the Alberta Cabinet. This is one of his correspondences. Watch for further samples in future issues of ESN

Dear Gene,

My goodness Gene, you must have some feline genetic materials somewhere in your cells—you have as many political lives as the proverbial cat with its nine lives. Mark Burnett, with his Survivor franchise, would be smart to put you in the next group of players to ensure some skilful playing that would make Richard Hatch from the first season look like a kid still wet behind the ears. Maybe it's those years of Ukrainian dancing that have made you so quick and skilful on your feet.

There you are, back at the cabinet table with King Eddie the Unstable and his gang of nonentities. Not too hard to sparkle a little in such a dull crowd. You backed the wrong horse in the race last year, but I suspect you were getting yourself realigned with the guys who came out on top before Jim Dinning and Ted Morton had even had the vote count announcement sink in and understood what had happened to them.

And I bet you in any given week these days you manage to be part of some wink wink nudge nudge coffee chat with Grit movers and shakers exploring how to replace Professor Kevin with a politician who'd have half a chance of getting a few more Liberals elected and with another group of shadowy guys in the Tory ranks evaluating scenarios to prevent a Harry Strom version of the end

of the PC era in Alberta if our cattleman from Vegreville crashes, as some say he is on track to do. And both groups probably figure they've got you onside for when they make their move.

Gene you skate so smoothly in and out of the social circles of Edmonton, your well-modulated sonorous voice sounding reassuring and significant while it drones on with many words and little meaning. You are the classic case study of the politician who can manage to be all things to all people by avoiding being anything that actually matters. I watch in wonder as you make a career of congratulating people and handing out cheques, rather than taking any stands on messy issues that will make a difference in the long run. The string of honorary memberships you have in more organizations than I knew existed is cash in the bank when it comes to an election campaign.

You know how to never miss a chance to say a few words at anything, always leaving a sense of fuzzy feel-goodness behind as you glide on. You're the expert at arriving early for that important room-working before things get started, and getting out before the end, always having to get on to something else. You know wardrobe and grooming are far more significant in creating a reputation than having deep understanding of public policy issues, you keep your moustache trimmed just right and can show a line of smooth white teeth in a joyful smile anytime you sense a camera in range.

So now you're in charge of solving all the problems in the capital region, our thirty small minded little municipalities all fighting for their turf, still thinking it's 1957 and they can all keep on behaving like the world ends at the edge of town. What a chance you have to wheel and deal, to dangle a carrot here, hint at a stick there, and pile up more little debts and favours owed than even Ken Kowalski has managed up in his dukedom at Westlock- Barrhead.

What are you thinking of doing with that opportunity Gene? My guess is you're calculating neither Ms Leibovici nor Mr. Nichol could swing a win in the 2010 mayoral election if they were up against you being able to take credit for making Edmonton the undisputed king of the castle in the capital region. And then you'll have six years to coast along, right up until it will be time to retire.

I'm sure you're having a fine summer Gene, taking in all the events, patting plenty of backs, staying slickly on the move so no one can pin you down to anything where you might need to make a commitment, weaving your own web while everyone else imagines you're just a faithful and sincere bit player. Smooth Gene, smooth.

With admiration,

Ted White

Racism- We Can't Just Keep Blaming the Government

There are far too many people struggling to have marginally decent lives in the City of Edmonton. The person you bought this paper from is probably trying to live on \$20 or \$30 a day, to cover all expenses—in a city where AVERAGE rent for a one-bedroom apartment is over \$800 a month alone. So luxuries like eating (especially extravagances like fresh fruit and vegetables or dairy products), or having a change of clothes to wear, or paying for vitamins or needed medications, or, heaven forbid, something really wild and crazy like going to see a discount Tuesday movie might be a bit tough to include in the budget.

And this great unfairness endured by a minority, maybe ten or 15 percent of people in the whole city, living in misery while most of us enjoy more affluence than the world has ever seen before can be blamed to quite a degree on governments. Welfare payments are too low, minimum wage is too low, there is not enough low-income affordable housing being built—you've heard all the reasons.

It's important to fault governments that do a poor job, and to hold them responsible. We need to be phoning elected people and telling them to do things differently, and we need to decide how to vote at election time by looking at what the politicians have done for the least wealthy and powerful in our community.

But there are parts to the story of this unfairness in our community that come closer to home for many of us personally, parts of the story that are more uncomfortable to face, because the finger we point is not at someone else, but at ourselves.

When anyone suggests that racism might have anything to do with the problems some people experience, many others get hostile and defensive, completely denying it. But there are many people who are not from white European backgrounds who tell graphic stories of experiencing racism in our city. Is it just chance that the amount of deep poverty amongst aboriginal people and newer immigrants (most of whom are not white people) is much higher than with others? Are all the stories of rudeness or being treated like you are invisible just in the imaginations of those reporting them? Is racism only the vicious cross-burning stuff, or is it in the condescending and tokenism of soft-hearted but deeply biased people too? Are those

coloured heathens, whether from a reserve in northern Alberta or the Dark Continent itself, every bit our equals?

Racism does its damage more by causing some people to be treated unfairly and denied opportunities than in the form of outright insults. That's why there's such a link between poverty and racism.

Yet at any meeting if racism is mentioned as a factor in relation to some social problem, energetic denials are the automatic reaction of nearly every official in attendance. That's why it was an important day when people gathered at City Hall in late June to watch Mayor Stephen Mandel sign Edmonton's membership in the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination.

Tucked in amongst all the other events marking the start of summer—The Works, street performers, jazz and more—there was our mayor signing his autograph to make Edmonton only the 14th community in the whole country to make a formal commitment not to pretend racism happens other places but to seriously look at our own city for signs of its destructive corruption.

The heart of joining the coalition, which was created by the United Nations, is that the City will develop a municipal action plan to make Edmonton racism-free. That is going to need to start with an honest look at where we are now, both as a city and as individuals.

Joining the coalition carries with it very specific actions, not just lip service, for the City. For example:

To increase vigilance against racism—develop better and faster ways to identify incidents and respond actively,

To monitor racism and report to citizens on it, get it more in the awareness of all of us as an issue,

To insist the police be a model of an institution that combats racism,

To make sure as an employer there is no racism of any sort in the City's own behavior—again by proactive auditing of action, not just responding to complaints,

To look at the housing market and see if racism is an issue in the behavior of landlords.

But the real success of Edmonton as a community that has eliminated racism will

depend in the end not only on what the City does, but on what each of us do, to carefully examine our own lives and attitudes and see where we think differently of people or treat them differently because of our own prejudices. All the official documents and bylaws can only do so much.

Next year the world will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that states in many ways that all of us are of the same value and deserve fairness in how we treat each other. Making personal commitments to follow the City's lead and search our own lives for signs of racism in the year ahead would be a good way to prepare for that celebration and to do our part to demonstrate our appreciation for the City's action in joining the coalition.

You can get more information and read the whole declaration at the City's website, www.edmonton.ca.

By Jim Gurnett



PETER GOLDRING
Member of Parliament
Edmonton East

HOW MUCH SUBSIDY IS NEEDED TO MAKE RENTAL HOUSING AFFORDABLE?

A concerning trend in Alberta is the ever increasing number of lower income workers, some making \$15.00 per hour, that just can't find a home to rent at a price that they can afford. Meanwhile the ever decreasing remaining stock of entry level private sector rental units are being converted to condos at an alarming rate.

Because of the void of newly built affordable private rental housing, some have moved into non-profit housing such as that supplied by the Edmonton Inner City Housing Society. The question though is how much public money is needed and for how long to simply make rental housing affordable and to still allow necessary income for operating costs.

Private sector rental housing developers, the so-called 'for profit' sector, who could provide the same housing, are greatly disadvantaged competitively by the numerous public grants and financial advantages given to the so-called 'non-profit' groups which pays for their land and construction costs and further pays ongoing rent subsidies which tops up rents to market average rents.

To further give permanent property tax free status to certain non-profit organizations for otherwise fairly conventional rental housing further disadvantages the private sector and impinges on a city's bottom line taxation paid service base for fire and police services, etc, and seemingly is excessive given numerous other construction capital and operating grants.

Recently the City of Edmonton has recognized this inconsistency of taxation policy between similar rental housing providers and is asking for taxation equality, by requesting the payment of property taxes. The City after all has to provide services that property taxes should be paying for.

Is this fair?
What do you think?

On Mary Mac, King Ralph, Unsteady Eddie and the trickle-down theory of economics

Allan Sheppard



Allan Sheppard is a freelance writer and editor, and a volunteer writer for Edmonton Street News. As a pensioner, he finds himself from time to time on the edge of poverty and homelessness. As a self-appointed community elder, he thinks and worries about the needs of children, youth, parents and others who face lives of poverty and inadequate education in the midst of unprecedented wealth.

The Politics and Rhetoric of Poverty in the Midst of Plenty

In a time when we all had nothing, it was easy to have nothing. Now, when everybody seems to have plenty, if you are one of the people who has nothing, then life is very, very difficult, because you see everybody else passing across the horizon, and you seem to be marooned.—Mary McAleese, President of the Republic of Ireland, in an interview on the CBC Radio One program, Sunday Edition, 24 June 2007.

At last, just when it seemed beyond hope, Canadians meet a leader who understands in her head—and in her gut, and in her heart—what it means to be poor in a time and place where nearly everyone else is rich, or seems to be rich, or expects to get rich tomorrow.

Her name is Mary McAleese, and her people know her affectionately as Mary Mac. She

is half-way through her second term as the elected head of state of the Republic of Ireland. I wish we had such a leader in Alberta.

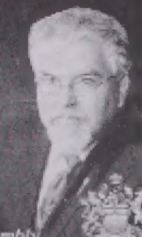
Instead, we have Unsteady Eddie—Easy (easily-confused) Ed, Honest (honestly-ineffectual) Ed—Stelmach and his bumbling gang of four: the self-righteous, self-satisfied Lyle Oberg (finance); the self-righteous, self-important Lloyd Snelgrove (treasury board); the self-satisfied, self-deluded Ray Danyluk (municipal affairs); and the self-effacing, self-satisfied Greg Melchin (seniors and community supports). The four ministers are responsible for Alberta's finances and for (among many other things) delivering social and housing programs that meet the needs of Alberta's poor in a time of plenty. The premier is responsible for providing vision and leadership to these ministers. None of them, not the ministers, certainly not the premier, has shown himself equal to the task of leading our province in times of prosperity that look more and more like times of excess. They are running from behind and running scared, chasing after whatever they think is public opinion.

Staggering in Ralph's footsteps

We shouldn't be surprised. They are simply staggering in the footsteps of Ralph Klein and his gang of self-aggrandisers. You remember King Ralph. He's the guy that thought Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was an admirable leader and wrote a carelessly researched paper for a course at Athabasca University in which he tried to make a case for Pinochet as a great economic manager. He is also the guy who misunderstood, and ultimately misgoverned, Alberta in

Continued on back page

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The Politics and Rhetoric of Poverty in the Midst of Plenty

Continued from page 7

spite of (or was it because of?) windfall revenues due to inflated international oil markets (beyond his control) and giveaway concessions to the oil industry (within his control, but beyond his capacity to understand or cope with the implications). He made a mess of things. Then he left.

I hate to think what everybody's buddy Ralph would say about Mary McAleese.

And I hate to think what he, or Ed Stelmach, or Lyle Oberg, or Lloyd Snelgrove would say about this vision of Ireland's prosperity described by President McAleese, also on the CBC program I referred to above:

I have to say...that we have an ethic in Ireland. We have an ambition, more than ethic. We have a very strong ambition that attaches to that ethic, which is...to create a...fully inclusive republic. In fact, our republic will not be complete...until it includes everybody and until there is nobody on the margins (and) everybody is in the mainstream.

We have a dirty word for that kind of talk in Alberta: socialism. Ireland has been remarkably entrepreneurial in its climb to the top of the economic ladder in Europe and to fourth place on the latest United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). But such talk is still socialist by the standards of our tired, unimaginative, uncreative leadership.

To be fair, capitalist, business-friendly Alberta has achieved economic success similar to or better than Ireland's. We are at the top of the economic ladder, however temporarily, in North America. And it's a good bet that Alberta's rank would equal or better Ireland's on the HDI, if we were a country, instead of a province of Canada, which ranks a respectable, though disappointing, sixth.

(Mis)managing resources, natural and human

But that's where the similarity ends. Ireland, lacking any significant natural resources, has chosen to concentrate on developing its human resources through education and a strategic immigration policy. Alberta does not control its immigration policy, but it does control education. And with one of the highest high-school dropout rates in Canada, it can be said to be mismanaging that control.

Alberta also controls, and mismanages, its resources. Under Ralph Klein it bungled that control to the point where a significant portion of the bloated revenues from those resources are being frittered away simply trying to keep up with the inflation that has been spawned by unplanned and uncontrolled development—and with the environmental and social damage that has come with that development.

Premier Stelmach has made noises suggesting he wants to correct that situation, but it may be too little, too late. Nor does it seem that Stelmach and his crew have the vision or the ability to act effectively or rationally to fix the mess Klein left behind. They can find hundreds of thousands, perhaps in the end billions, of dollars to throw at high-priced, high-end medical facilities. Yet they can't find the money or the method to provide or foster housing that people can afford—whether they exist on the margins or increasingly in the mainstream—and we now see the poorest of the poor living in tents in downtown Edmonton, some of them accused by police of activities that speak as much to desperation and despair as to the depravity with which the police and others seem to want to tar them.

How can this be?

Stuck in a memory warp

Let me offer a few more words from Mary McAleese by way of explanation:

In my living memory, we (in Ireland) were a third-world country. Today we are a first-world country, but we have a third-world memory. And I think that's a very important thing to have. It keeps us humble. It keeps us very conscious of our sense of moral responsibility to those other people in the world who...unfortunately are still continuing to starve, even in a world of plenty.

Humble. Moral responsibility. Can you imagine anyone in the current Alberta government saying anything remotely as perceptive and enlightened as that? I can't.

Albertans and their leaders have forgotten the days of the Great Depression of the 1930s when, like the people of Ireland until much more recently, we were effectively a third-world country. Now we are, to adapt McAleese's words, a first-world economy with a first-world memory. A memory without heart. A memory without guts or courage. A memory without imagination. A memory without empathy or sympathy. A memory without subtlety of thought or analysis. A memory that knows everything and understands nothing.

If our leaders going back to Ralph Klein remember anything, it is the recession of the 1970s, when some Albertans attached an iconic bumper sticker to their vehicles: Please, God, send us another oil boom. We promise not to piss it away this time.

So determined are we—and have we been—not to piss away our latest chance at boom-based prosperity that we are ready, even anxious, to act as if the inevitable bust will never happen.

We and our leaders seem anxious, as well, to believe that our success, if we have it, is due to our own efforts and achievements and to believe, by the same logic, that others' failures are due to their lack of effort and achievements. While such assumptions may be true for some (or even many) Albertans in either case, it is not true of all in both. Mary McAleese would not, I believe, penalize those who are poor and marginalized through no effort or lack of effort of their own in order not to "reward" the few who we should not, and perhaps effectively cannot, help.

Of course McAleese's words could be pure rhetoric, like the words of Ralph Klein and the Klein clones in the current government. I know which rhetoric I prefer. And which offers better leadership.

Albertans, by the rhetorical standards of its recent and current leaders, may not be pissing away the opportunities in the current oil boom. But they are pissing away the lives and wellbeing of our marginalized poor and possibly the social and environmental futures of our children. They may not intend it, but that is the actual result in terms of the poor and the potential result in terms of society and the environment.

Or should I say they are rhetorically pissing directly on the marginalized poor, or society, and our environment?

Think of that as an alternative interpretation of the trickle-down theory of economics so

popular among the neo-conservatives of our provincial government in times of prosperity as in times of recession.

Think of it, and be ashamed.

Be very ashamed.

Allan Sheppard

Moving On

By Dave

You are so cold
That I now choose to be alone,
Even under your roof
I never had a home.
To be that cold, that twisted -
The kind of place I'll never
Allow myself to be imprisoned in again.
Your misery felt like forever.
I wouldn't even call you a friend
Because you didn't even realize
Your own ugly sickness,
And I'm gone with all the quickness
That I could muster
Cause I can't trust her
And I'm tired of trying,
Being burned and frying.

My world once revolved around you
Until experience taught me how utterly untrue
you were
In your own selfish little world.
You were only a loan
While I waited for someone real,
A person who could feel
Beyond their own raunchy needs,
Someone who didn't need to feed
Upon the blood of other people's misery.
You are still unable to see,
Too unstable to change,
Still walking in the rain.

Heartless and cruel
Or so the story goes.
Heartless and cruel
And man you're growing old.
Always angry and grim
Probably wishing you were again
Like in the old times
When you still had half a mind,
Maybe even a bit of a future.
Now all you have left is poor sight to see
Sucks to be you
Thank God, I'm still me.

I am what I am

By Naomi Norgaard

I...I am what I am.

So then why do I hold this pain, can you see it?

Does it look like a scar?

Or is it still marks from the chain that once-held me.

It's like I'm still there, hanging, just hanging.
I can't even wait to fall even if it hurts me or kills me.

I just want to feel like I'm grounded for once.

Instead of the blood trophy that bleeds you life.

You ate of me once, I will not freely put on those chains again.
Even if you shape them into wings
They still are chains.
No, I fell some how free from you're grasp.
So then, can you see this pain you gave me?
Does it look like scars?
Or are they still marks from where you once held me?
In the end it does not matter.
For I am free, no thanks to you.

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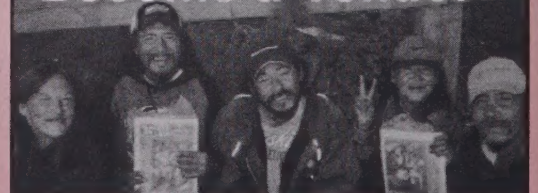
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